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Statement submitted by Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and Commerce, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Mountain communities around the world are disproportionately affected by the challenges of globalization. They live in harsh conditions in remote areas, often at high altitudes. These factors, combined with weak access to infrastructure, as well as social, economic and political marginalization result in high levels of poverty in many mountain areas. Emerging problems such as climate change, desertification and migration are aggravating this situation. National governments and the international community can and should do more to support these communities that also are the environmental stewards of mountain regions rich in natural resources including the sources for much of the freshwater upon which humanity depends.

An estimated 39 percent of the mountain population in developing countries, some 329 million people, are considered vulnerable to food insecurity, according to a recent study of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Furthermore, the study revealed a 30 percent increase in the number of mountain people vulnerable to food insecurity from 2000 to 2012. This study was led by the Secretariat of the Mountain Partnership which is an alliance dedicated to improving the lives of mountain peoples and protecting mountain environments around the world. On behalf of the mountain communities, we must ensure availability of basic amenities such as food, water, a healthy environment, reliable electricity, and sanitation.

This High Level Political Forum provides an opportunity to address the challenges facing mountain communities to transform them into more sustainable and resilient societies and to bring them to the center of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Two sustainable development goals under the review of this forum contain three mountain targets: Target 6.6: by 2020, protect and restore water related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes; Target 15.1: by 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements; Target 15.4: by 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development.

We would like to report about collaborative experiences with Utah Valley University, a Mountain Partnership member since 2006, as one of the examples to transform mountain communities towards sustainable and resilient societies. Since joining the Mountain Partnership, the university encourages faculty and students to contribute to the sustainable mountain development agenda of the United Nations in the State of Utah, North America, and in developing countries globally. It allowed the university also to implement the mountain targets under the Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, which states that "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."

Utah Valley University is the largest university in mountainous Utah, a state with one of the most successful models of economic development in the United States. While the United Nations encourages youth in promoting and implementing the sustainable development goals, Utah Valley University provided opportunities for inclusive involvement across campus for students, especially non-traditional, in activities related to the United Nations. Non-traditional students are described as

individuals who may have delayed enrolment into postsecondary education, attended university part-time, work full time, are financially independent, have children or dependents other than a spouse, or are single parents. These students represent more than 30% of college students within the United States. Most of them also possess a diverse set of professional skills and experiences, which they are ready, and eager to contribute to the benefit of the communities in which they reside — mountainous communities in particular. Through the developed model, Utah Valley University sources the wealth of experiences, knowledge, and financial contributions, from students to tackle environmental and social issues.

Under the engaged learning model, students gain professional skills, experiences, and proper recognition by addressing real-world sustainability problems of mountain communities at local, regional, and global levels with an instructor serving them as a mentor. The model represents a co-curricular pedagogy with the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at university that functions as a major vehicle for student group learning and implementation of the United Nations agenda that focuses on mountain targets. Creation of a coalition of clubs provides students more choices to select a club based on professional interest and to implement several initiatives in parallel.

Most recently, the members of the Foreign Affairs club and the leadership of the Utah International Mountain Forum, through engaged learning model, advocated for the sustainability of mountain women and communities at the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women. During the two-year preparation, students raised funds for the visit, arranged logistics and protocol, and built ties with experts from the United Nations, representatives of diplomatic missions from mountain states accredited to the United Nations, and non-governmental organizations with consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, including three of our institutions. As a result, eleven Utah Valley University students, co-hosted a side-event titled, "Advocating for rural and mountain women globally through student engaged learning" on 19 March 2018, and a parallel event titled, "Education for sustainable development to empower rural and mountain women" on 20 March 2018. During both events, they reported on the advocacy of the mountain women since 2007, when Utah Valley University hosted the first international Women of the Mountains conference under the umbrella of the Mountain Partnership. The university hosts conferences as an implementation of the United Nations Resolution "International Year of Mountains, 2002" and a major contribution to the promotion of the gender as part of the sustainable mountain development agenda in the State of Utah and North America. The fourth and most recent international Women of the Mountains conference was hosted in Utah on 7-9 October 2015 by the club coalition Utah International Mountain Forum as a student engaged learning initiative. Members of the coalition, the majority of whom were non-traditional students, raised funds to host the event and brought to Utah diplomats, experts, and women from the mountain regions of the United States as well as from more than 20 mountain nations worldwide.

During the same time, members of the Sustainable Mountain Development club, which is also a part of the coalition, addressed the problems of a climate change and air quality in the state of Utah. Today those issues represent some of the biggest challenges for the Rocky Mountain region and Utah communities as well. According to a 2007 report by the International Panel on Climate Change, sections 4.4 and 15.2, higher elevations of the Northern Rockies have experienced three times the global average temperature increase over the past century and these very same ecosystems provide up to 85 percent of water sources for both human consumption, and fauna and flora of various ecosystems of the region. Within the Intermountain Region that comprises the state of Utah, local livelihoods experienced far more challenging

transition than other areas of the continental United States. Utah Valley University is located in a valley surrounded by mountains that rise nearly 7,000 feet above the valley in a relatively condensed area. This makes the entire region very susceptible to environmental degradation.

On 30 January 2018, the Faculty Senate for Utah Valley University passed a resolution with a commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by the year 2050 and administration is committing to hire its first sustainability coordinator arriving in Spring 2019. Those initiatives are in line with the previous activities of students on climate change in particular initiated by the Mountain Partnership. As one of the highlights, students gathered signatures under the petition to discuss the impact of climate change on mountain communities in the agenda of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP 21, in Paris, France, 30 November–12 December 2015. At that time, students collected more than 1,800 signatures in support of the petition of the 5,000 required by the United Nations.

The State of Utah suffers from some of the worst air quality in the nation and over the past 10 years has consistently received "F" and "D" rankings from the American Lung Association. According to their 2016 report, the Salt Lake City-Provo-Orem metro area and Logan registered the sixth and fifth-most unhealthy air days from 2012–2014 respectively. Members of the Sustainable Mountain Development club, together with a university-based student research team, are tackling the issue by examining causes and effects of poor air quality in different areas of the State of Utah for the purpose of submitting a relevant bill for the adoption during 2019 Utah State Legislative session. The team is also undertaking immediate measures such as encouraging increased use of the public transit system by the university's students, faculty, and staff through an on-campus campaign during March–May 2018. In addition, members of the club are networking with other organizations within Utah and nationwide in an action toward implementation of similar commitments to transform local communities towards sustainable and resilient societies.

The Utah International Mountain Forum has been highlighted for the first time by the United Nations Secretary-General's Report on sustainable mountain development A/71/256, from 29 July 2016 for hosting the fourth international Women of the Mountains conference. This was indeed the acknowledgment from the United Nations, that the developed model successfully engages students in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As another highlight, the same report included the recommendations of the final document of the conference, which contribute to the main theme of this High Level Political Forum: "... (b) Successful implementation of target 6.6 could be achieved by supporting the vital role that women play in the protection of the environment and water sources, particularly as custodians of traditional knowledge that builds resilience and allows for adaptation to climate change; (c) With respect to target 15.1, women play a critical role in joint planning as promoters of innovation, development and cooperation for common benefit."

We would like to highlight another important advantage of this model: since 2006, Utah Valley University students, and non-traditional ones in particular, were able to raise funds elsewhere and contribute to the overall advocacy of the sustainable mountain development agenda of the United Nations in the State of Utah, North America and globally more than US $250,000. They did that as another example of the implementation of the United Nations Resolution "International Year of Mountains, 2002."

The developed model of engaged learning demonstrates that students are able, and must, play in the active implementation of the 2030 development agenda of the

United Nations. Student engaged learning initiative, if used by interested universities in rural and mountainous states worldwide, could provide similar benefits both to students and in particularly non-traditional, and in addressing sustainable and environmentally conscious community development strategies for rural and mountain areas and transforming them towards sustainable and resilient societies.